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I-40 bridge reopens following hours-long protest

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By WMCActionNews5.com Staff [CONNECT](#)

MEMPHIS, TN (WMC) - Black Lives Matter protesters blocked the Interstate 40 bridge for several hours Sunday night.

The protest started in Downtown Memphis around 6 p.m. It was scheduled to move through downtown toward National Civil Rights Museum, but instead, protesters diverted the route, jumped a barrier, and shut down the I-40 bridge.

Traffic remained blocked on Interstate 40 for about four hours.

Mobile users: Click here to see more pictures of the protest.

"We're trying to get equal rights," one protester said. "We want things to be fair. We want our voices to be heard."

The protest remained peaceful. There are no reports of injuries or arrests.

The majority of the protest ended around 11 p.m., but some protesters remained. Black Lives Matter organizer Minister Devante Hill issued a statement urging the rest of the protesters to go home.

"While we are compassionate to the inconveniences that this protest has caused the city, we are more than happy and excited that this protest was completely peaceful, no arrest, thus far have been made, and if Dr Martin Luther King, Congressman John Lewis or any other trailblazers in the movement of peace and equality were here tonight, they'd be proud. To all respectful and compliant protesters...from the bottom of my heart thank you! To those who are still at the bridge, our message has been clear and it has been heard. Please dispersed so that we can move forward with a more productive impact as Director Rallings has committed to."

-- Minister Devante Hill

Earlier in the night, protesters spoke with media crews about why they organized Sunday's demonstration.

"What's going on across the country is people are saying enough is enough," Black Lives Matter member Tami Sawyer said. "And no more to generations and centuries of brutality against African-American people."

Memphis Police Department Interim Director Mike Rallings visited the crowd and spoke with protesters. He said he planned to work with protesters to address their concerns.

"I think about this last year. People all over the city and the Commercial Appeal celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Selma march, where Dr. Martin Luther King and hundreds of African-Americans were hosed by water and attacked by dogs and beaten by police during a peaceful protest for their rights," Sawyer said. "Fifty years after that, we're still fighting against the same injustices and while it is true that blocking traffic could have some dire consequences, the chance of that happening here are still much more slimmer than a black person being faced with systematic racism and injustice."

Rallings and other officers of all races linked arms and walked hand-in-hand with protesters from the bridge to FedExForum.

At FedExForum, protesters discussed their cause with Rallings. They praised his work tonight and asked for his continued support.

Some protesters even prayed with Rallings.

After protesters got Rallings' ear, they turned their attention to Mayor Jim Strickland. Protesters said they wanted to know where the Mayor was. He later released the following statement:

"As a majority black city, I recognize that Memphis is part of a larger national conversation about race in America, and how some of our citizens feel disenfranchised. To that end, I am hopeful that our city will remain part of the conversation in a way that is respectful and recognizes our humanity."

As Memphis mayor, I respect the Constitution and the right to assemble peacefully in protest. Tonight, the protests have been peaceful thanks to the great work of the Memphis Police Department, the Tennessee Highway Patrol and all of our partners."

There will be an initial conversation tonight and we will have follow-up conversations in the coming days. We are here to fully support those conversations -- and my door has always been open. But we want to do it in a legal way, as well. Let me be clear: you can exercise your First Amendment rights without breaking the law."

-- Mayor Jim Strickland

Following the protests, Strickland met with his senior leadership team to discuss the protest and what can be done to make the Memphis community better.

“ Meeting tonight with members of my senior leadership team and MPD's leadership team. pic.twitter.com/EeC4OX6Pyn
 — Mayor Jim Strickland (@MayorMemphis) [July 11, 2016](#)

Faith Morris, Chief Marketing and External Affairs Officer for National Civil Rights Museum, spoke from her home about the protest. She said the protest and Black Lives Matter movement have gotten the attention of Memphis and the country.

"I really think that we have got to take our communities back," Morris said. "We need to stop having the 'It's not my business; I'm not going to get involved in that,' [mentalities], because ultimately we are all impacted by it."

Morris said it's time for the communities to come up with solutions to the problems it faces.

"We're at a crisis, and we have to act like it. We're past the time to talk about it, now we need a plan," Morris said. "So, I hope our city leaders are somewhere huddled, trying to figure out exactly what their next moves are, and to let us in on it so we can follow suit."

[CLICK HERE to listen to an interview with MPD spokesman Louis Brownlee.](#)

NAACP Memphis chapter president Keith Norman released the following statement in support of the protest:

“ The NAACP stands with and fully supports the rights of The Black Lives Matter Movement and all citizens to gather in peaceful protest. The peaceful gathering demonstrates our awareness and disdain with the poor economic policies of our city and its priorities as well as the national sentiment towards injustices that permeate the disproportional contact between law enforcement and people of color.
 -- NAACP Memphis Chapter President Keith Norman

Early on during the protest, a car trying to escort a child to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital was blocked by the protesters, but the protesters eventually allowed the car through.

City leaders will be present for a community meeting on Monday at Greater Imani Church. Mayor Strickland and Interim Director Rallings will both be present for the meeting at 4 p.m.

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